

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

Public Information Department, 11150 East Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340

PRESS RELEASE

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COMFORTABLY SEATED

Through February 15, 1987

The largely Western tradition of sitting on chairs and the various designs and materials used in making chairs--whether intended mainly for comfort or as symbols of power and status--are examined in *Comfortably Seated*. Drawn mainly from the collection of The Cleveland Museum of Art, this exhibition of twenty chairs, stools, and other seat furniture from ancient Egypt to the present will be on view in the Classroom Level Gallery of the Museum through February 15, 1987.

The oldest piece of furniture in the exhibition, an Egyptian funerary stool dating from about 2000-1850 B.C., illustrates the mortise and tenon method of securing joints, still the standard mode of construction for wooden furniture. This stool features carved legs and feet representing the limbs of animals, an embellishment which has endured to the present day in almost every culture. The x-shaped support of folding seats has also persisted from ancient Egypt and Greece to the 20th century and is beautifully incorporated in a richly upholstered stool made around 1786-87 for Marie Antoinette's game room at Compiegne. The "x" shape was adapted as well by Mies van der Rohe for his 1929 Barcelona Chair, which employs a modern material, steel, for the frame.

Traditionally chairs were conceived as structures to be viewed primarily from the front; this is particularly evident in a mahogany side chair (ca. 1800) attributed to Samuel McIntire of Salem, Massachusetts. A mid-18th century French armchair in rococo style presents a more sculptural approach to chair design. The sides of the chair assume a richness of decoration

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comparable to that of the front. A more recent example of the chair conceived as sculpture is architect Hector Guimard's art nouveau side chair, of pearwood and tooled leather, from about 1900. Continuous curving forms link the chair's major structural elements.

Although 19th-century furniture makers had the advantage of newly developed materials and technologies, their designs for chairs usually revived earlier styles. The lack of congruity between style and technology prompted some designers at the turn of the century to return to individually designed and handcrafted furniture, while others sought to develop styles that were both innovative and appropriate to the machine age. The Austrian architect Josef Hoffmann's chair constructed of wood bent under heat and pressure, designed around 1904, exemplifies a stylistically and technologically innovative design. In the 20th century, factors such as comfort and convenience, and the use of metals, molded laminated wood, and plastics, have affected furniture design, as evidenced in the Health Chair (1938) and the stacking Ant Chair (1952).

The continuing development of seat furniture can be seen in the 1986 Balans Chair, lent by Hag U.S.A., Inc. It offers surfaces for sitting and kneeling, but no back rest. It is available for visitors to try during the exhibition.

Organized by Henry Hawley, Chief Curator of Later Western Art at the Museum, *Comfortably Seated* is accompanied by a free illustrated brochure. Gallery talks will be presented on Wednesday, December 3, and Sunday, December 7, at 1:30 pm, by Mariana Carpinisan, Instructor in the Museum's Department of Education.

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For more information or black-and-white photographs, please contact the Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.